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ABSTRACT

This document cites theoretical works and actual cases to examine the notion of community as the web of learning. The first half of the document explores the different perspectives about the concept of community and traces the evolved nature of community through an overview of how humans have banded together to form communities from the early days of the human species to the present. Issues raised include the role of education in preparing children for lifelong learning and effective community participation, the hidden curriculum of compulsory schooling, and the interplay between individual and community interests. The second half of the document profiles two community initiatives to further community development by improving local educational opportunities. In the first initiative, which took place in Princeton, New Jersey, community members spent 2 years crafting a plan to improve local schools, help adults regain their enthusiasm for learning, and work toward functional literacy for all community members. In the second initiative, called Letchworth Education 2000, residents of Letchworth, England, formed 12 community study groups that spent 12 months working to improve in-school and post-school education in their community, including having 15% of local teachers spend 3 weeks shadowing community members in their workplaces. (Contains 22 endnotes.) (MN)

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The 21st Century Learning Initiative

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COMMUNITY AS THE WEB OF LEARNING

By John Abbott and Terry Ryan

INTRODUCTION

The Initiative focuses on the issue of community at the very beginning of this program for several reasons. One is pre-eminent…children in the Western World spend no more than 20 percent of their waking hours in a classroom between the ages of five and 18-years. More than three-quarters of a young person's time is not under the supervision of a teacher, or organised by a school. Thus, the greater proportion of children's time is spent in many places other than classrooms– with their peer group, in shops, sports facilities, libraries, or just "hanging out" in their own home or the homes of their friends. As learning is essentially a social and meaning making activity, who children are with, and what they are doing, is critically important to how they learn, as well as to what they learn.

It is facile to think that children "turn their brains on" as they go into a classroom, and then turn them off when they leave. (The reverse may well be the case). Given the nature of human inquisitiveness, learning occurs whenever someone is in a position to benefit by finding yet another way of "making sense" of fascinating ideas and situations. There is only one word to describe this vast array of learning opportunity, and that is the overused word "Community." As the needs of young learners change evermore rapidly, and as "just in time" learning becomes increasingly necessary for adaptability, it will be on people's ability to draw on all the resources, skills and experiences available around them that so much learning will depend.

For too long we have come to think of learning as something done in institutions and separate from the rest of life…that is a very limited way of thinking. In a brilliant analysis of the impact of technology on working practices Shoshana Zuboff wrote *In the Age of the Smart Machine* in 1988, "Learning is not something which requires time out from productive activity; Learning is at the very heart of productive activity."[1] Social groups provide the resources for their members to learn. Learning essentially is a community activity; powerful learning has to be both social and active – hence our focus on community.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

"We have not inherited this world from our parents; we have been loaned it by our children."

Native North American Proverb

"Community" is, nevertheless, a slippery concept – as indeed are many other terms beloved of sociologists and philosophers. Just as the word "learning" seems automatically to conjure up visions of schooling, so in the minds of the public at large (including politicians) community seems to be a "catch-all" type of expression that is so imprecise that it is either ignored or spoken about in the abstract. Indeed the concept to many people is so hazy that politicians concerned about the learning needs of young people see solutions almost exclusively in terms of institutional provision. Others go further and argue that, "Community builders condemn themselves to failure if they do not realise that for good historical and psychological reasons many people perceive efforts to establish community as an inherently undemocratic notion, a thrust that is necessarily homogenising and often hierarchical."[2] Such people see community as the root of oppression and domination, and put their trust in the influence of formal state-sponsored structures.

Schools are what these people understand. Responsibility falls in the hand of professionals such as appointed administrators and bureaucrats or elected politicians. Schools, it is argued, are more responsive to the interests and concerns of various groups who traditionally do not have a strong voice in the larger community. The work of schools can be more precisely defined, compromised and measured. No one, it seems, is responsible for community – such matters are best left out of the equation. They are simply too complex. Unfortunately for young people this is a disaster as it places excessive emphasis on one part of children's lives, and leaves the greater proportion of their experience to chance.

Yet it is convenient to the general public at large, as well as to politicians and community leaders, to focus on schools. To require more of teachers can be seen as getting a "good deal" between what is paid, and what results. It becomes an appropriate balance between acceptable

legislation and rates of pay. It becomes an input-output system. You get what you expect to pay for. To require more of the community, however, means winning a change of heart right across all kinds and conditions of people. It means developing a community that is genuinely "child friendly"; a community where every adult accepts that they have a responsibility for children…to encourage children to debate and discuss important issues with them. It requires adults to practice what they preach. It means accepting that children's horizons are farther out than adults, and that policies that bring immediate rewards to the current generation may in fact be bad news for the younger generation.

This is, in reality, more a moral issue than a political issue. Governments can't set moral codes, but they do react to such codes. Another reason why the Initiative puts the community at the top of this program is that, after years of studying the evidence, we have come to the sober conclusion that much of the world is dealing not so much with a crisis in schooling, as it is with a crisis in childhood, and even more a crisis in community. Learning and community naturally go together, and this fact needs to lead us to a better understanding of what each means, and how they relate.

Ernest Boyer, the one-time president of the Carnegie Foundation in New Jersey, responded to the *Excellency Report* of 1984 issued by the U.S. government on education by noting, "To blame schools for the rising tide of mediocrity is to confuse symptoms with the disease; Schools can rise no higher than the expectations of the communities that surround them."[3] While some would dispute this in detail it really put the issues we are addressing into perspective. Schools act on behalf of parents; "in loco parentis." If parents do not understand what children need then schools do not have a clear mandate within which to operate.

What is Community? Peter Drucker argues in *The Post-Capitalist Society*, "People need roots…something they can get their arms around," He went on to sound like Alexis de Tocqueville when he argued, "to foster autonomous community organisations is an important step in turning around government…such communities would create a new centre of meaningful citizenship. This would require a social sector as well as the two normally recognised public and

private sectors."[4] If Drucker is correct then, the American social critic William A. Galston argues, "it is a mistake to believe that civil society (and communities) can remain strong if citizens withdraw from active engagement in political associations. Over time, the devitalisation of the public sphere is likely to yield a privatised hyper-individualism that enervates the civil sphere as well."[5] Such disengagement from the affairs of the community has a dramatic effect on children, and in particular on their ability to make sense of a world that seems increasingly fragmented.

This is a useful distinction. Too often, in England at any rate, when government looks beyond itself for partners it sees clearly leaders from the private sector and indeed actively seeks the support of business and commerce. In practice, it fails to identify the other nine tenths of the population as being the social sector. Money and politics of course go hand in hand, but in so many ways we have failed to realise the significance of human dynamics at the micro-scale. This has encouraged the destruction of strong communities. No wonder so many people have decided to opt-out of the democratic process, and single-issue politics are everywhere in the ascendant. Community is where traditionally all the conflicting expectations of individuals were resolved, but community is increasingly seen as being under threat from economic forces. Libby Purves, of The Times, warns, "Unfettered, me-first capitalism and the loss of community are a strain on the family. So is an ever more hopeless sense that 'they' are in control and make a new rule every week. If you create an edgy, uneasy, tired and hypochondrical society its members get more prone to give up the struggle and fall for irresponsible moonshine about nothing being anybody's fault."[6]

THE EVOLVED NATURE OF COMMUNITY

To try and better understand community let's go back to the origins of our species. Humans are essentially social creatures, and it is through learning that we become socialised. Learning involves becoming a member of a "community of practice" and thereby understanding its work and its talk from the inside. Learning from this perspective is far more than simply acquiring information; it requires developing the language, disposition, demeanour, and outlook of the

other community members.[7] "The key to understanding our evolutionary success, as well as our unique combination of everyday behaviours that sets us apart from any other living thing to date, is our unique talent as social beings,"[8] writes William Allman. Human survival is almost totally dependent on relationships with other people, and these relationships are dependent on learning.

Faced with a hostile environment, our ancestors banded together to achieve as a group what they could not do alone. We have evolved over millions of years to need each other – most of the time. But remember also that Cain killed his brother Abel. There is a dark side to human nature as well that has to be understood. Allman goes on to say, "the most complex, dangerous, challenges facing our ancient ancestors were indeed each other." It seems that, some 5,000 years ago, as man became ever less nomadic and more a sedentary urban dweller facing increased population pressures, we "became more vulnerable to exploitation by 'our' rulers and group-against-group aggression." That seems to be where we are now. Under certain circumstances our ability to hold together fractures very easily. Our inability to control such aggression fuels daily the news stories of every newspaper in the world.

The voice of the evolutionary psychologists began to be heard in the early 1990's. Driving their inquiry is the search to find a balance to the simple question, "If culture creates the individual, what then creates culture?" In synthesising the work of leading evolutionary psychologists Robert Wright wrote the "The Evolution of Despair" for Time in 1995. Wright noted that, "Perhaps the biggest surprise from evolutionary psychology is its depiction of the 'animal' in all of us. Freud and various thinkers since, saw civilisation as an oppressive force that thwarts man's basic animal urges such as lust and aggression, transmuting these into psychopathology. But evolutionary psychology suggests that a larger threat to mental health may be the way civilisation thwarts civility. There is a kinder, gentler side to human nature and it seems increasingly to be a victim of repression."[9] Wright went on to say, "The problem with modern life, increasingly, is less that we're 'over socialised' than that we're 'undersocialised' – or that too little of our social contact is social in the natural intimate sense of the word." In other words much of our current lifestyle works against our innate ways of developing community, and helping children take control of their own learning.

There is strong evidence to support the human species' predispositions to live within relatively small groups – maybe as small as the extended family (15 or so) or as large as 60 or 70 when only 12 or 15 of them are the dominant figures (Brazilian forest tribes), Various branches of history would suggest the evolutionary value of groups of between 10 and 15. Writing in *The Land We Have Left Behind*, the Cambridge historian Peter Lazlett suggested that for most of the past 1,000 years most people in England lived in units of only 13 to 15 people, and it was only when they came together in units larger than that – in the church or in the army – that they became potentially dysfunctional.[10] It seems, some psychologists point out, that in a single lifetime no one grieves deeply for more than a dozen people. The wells of human sympathy it seems, are much conditioned by the social environment from which we have evolved. Research would suggest that we have a predisposition towards moral behaviour amongst our closest relatives, but this rapidly disappears as the relationship becomes weaker.

On a spectrum of social organisation society is at the opposite extreme to the individual, with community and the family above the individual. Yet people are very unclear as to what these terms really mean. "Society is a given," writes the philosopher Elliot Deutsch, "something that everyone is born into and is nurtured through education and culture, whereas a community is essentially a voluntarily venture."[11] "A voluntary venture?" Margaret Thatcher with her unlimited faith in the free, untrammelled individual, claimed "there's no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women, and there are families." Families we know, are in great array so, on Margaret Thatcher's score, that really leaves our social arrangements in disarray. That is not good for the creation of learning environments.

Indeed such policies have had the unintended consequence of disconnecting children from the adult community. It is sometimes useful to point out the obvious, especially when it collides with short-term political and/or economic interests. Babies are born helpless and depend on someone who loves them to care for their many developmental needs. This is a fact. The preparation for lifelong learning and effective community participation starts at the very beginning of life. Ideally, children's learning should be supported by a loving and committed nuclear family

reinforced by the extended family, neighbours and the immediate community. It is well understood, by any measure, that this traditional arrangement is under threat (or has disappeared) for many. Nevertheless if the goal is to raise children up as successful life-long learners and productive members of communities, then the youngest children need an environment that offers them the stability, challenge, values and cohesiveness that we attribute to functional loving families. Children need to know where they belong.

John Taylor Gatto, the outspoken one time "New York State Teacher of the Year" writing in his book *Dumbing us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* defines communities as, "collections of families and friends who find major meaning in extending the family association to a band of honorary brothers and sisters. They are complex relationships of commonality and obligation that generalise to others beyond the perimeter of the homestead. When the integration of life that comes from being part of the family in a community is unattainable, the only alternative, apart from accepting a life in isolation, is to search for an artificial integration into one of the many expressions of networks currently available. It's a bad trade."[12]

Gatto argues, "Unlike communities, networks have a very narrow way of allowing people to associate, and that way is always across a short spectrum of one, or at most a few, specific uniformities...When people in networks suffer, they suffer alone, unless they have a family or community to suffer with them." For Gatto, networks are closely associated with formal government institutions or businesses, while communities are self-organising and informal. Gatto concludes that increasingly children spend time in networks (schools and formalised activities) and this comes at the expense of adults who lose out on the energy and curiosity of children. There is also evidence that this segregation of children from the real life of the community comes at the expense of their ability to make valid connections between their in school learning and real-life.[13]

Bob Rae, the former premier of Ontario argues for a balance between economic change and the needs of communities when he writes, "A politics that ignores self-interest deserves to fail. An

economics that ignores our common interests as citizens in the well being of the broader community will eventually face a wall of public hostility. The poet Oliver Goldsmith wrote at the beginning of the industrial revolution of a world where 'wealth accumulates and men decay."[14] This effort at balance sounds a bit like the English sociologist Anthony Giddens writing about the "The Third Way" in politics. Giddens writes, "the cornerstones of the new progressivism are said to be equal opportunity, personal responsibility and the mobilisation of citizens and communities."[15]

This seems to suggest that community, especially when expressed as a place, is where the interconnectiveness of all aspects of life are the most apparent. George Rupp, President of Rice University, pushes this thesis when he says "without shared commitments or common tasks there can be no community." Very simply, people who work together, hold together so that, "in the modern world, community is an achievement not a given."[16] The social critic John Macmurray adds, "A shared existence is a matter of intention, not of fact. Community has to be created and sustained by conscious purpose, and the more successfully this is done the more we fulfil our personal nature."[17]

What Macmurray means by fulfilling our personal nature is that it is through personal relationships that we discover ourselves. Aristotle put it nicely, "without a fully active role in community life one could not hope to become a healthy human being." Within a responsible relationship in a community "genuine freedom leads to a personality which is quietly confident; fully sensitive to others but not egocentric in petty and aggressive ways."[18] It is community that brings together autonomous individuals who have freely chosen a conscious set of values and goals. They have not been coerced but have come together naturally, and largely stay together. The key would seem to be common values, and a task to do. Jürgen Moltman from the University of Tubingen argues "knowing and community are mutually related to one another; in order to come together in community we must know each other; and in order to know one another we must come into contact with each other and enter into a relationship with each other."[19] In other words a community that talks together understands the connections between the various aspects

of life. A truly functional community knows that it can't have its cake, and eat it at the same time.

A community that thinks about the interests of all its members understands the importance of deferred gratification in a free society. Alexis de Tocqueville and other 18th and 19th century social philosophers held that religion provided the ultimate support for deferred gratification in a free society, and that ultimately this was the glue that held communities together. Tocqueville understood the paradox that a work ethic based on deferred gratification produces material prosperity – which gradually undermines the religious belief that justifies deferred gratification in the first place. In studying Tocqueville's classic *Democracy in America*, João Carlos Espada, a Portuguese social researcher, argues that Tocqueville knew that in an age of scepticism, religious belief was eroding. Despite this fact, Espada says, "he strongly opposed any sort of state enforcement of religion." Instead, Espada maintains, he urged that governments instil a "love of the future" by showing citizens that their long-term prosperity and that of their children depended on deferred gratification. In this way, Tocqueville hoped, citizens would be "gradually and unconsciously brought nearer to religious convictions."[20]

The challenge, to a large degree, for those interested in preserving and strengthening community in the early 21st century is to find a "glue" that will unify people of diverse interests and backgrounds around common agendas and dreams. Nowhere is this more important than in providing young people with a clear and acceptable answer to the question "Education for What?" If education and learning is seen only as an economic issue of preparing future workers and consumers then increasing numbers of children will see education as really being rather pointless, and indeed they might be right to think so.

A SENSE OF POSSIBILITY

The 21st Century Learning Initiative argued forcefully in *The Unfinished Revolution* that it was the institutionalisation of learning during the later stages of the Industrial Revolution that removed from the community the very task that had earlier given reason for its existence. The

induction of young people into shared values, goals and indeed a shared future was now seen to be a job for professionals. The vacuum this created within the community was never filled by other arrangements for young people, and this is the disaster that precipitated what was earlier defined as "the crisis of childhood." This focus on the economic and its impact on the learning of children is an important one for those concerned about children and the development of community.

It is within communities, which by their very nature include people with differing views and opinions, that young people first start to appreciate the essential interconnectiveness of people and events. It was to help build a sense of the interconnectedness of these powerful influences on children's learning – the home, the needs of employment, school, the new technologies – that the English education foundation, Education 2000, was founded in 1986. It sought to explore how the community at large could be an active participant in young people's learning. Without the full support of the community, Education 2000 argued, it would never be possible to reform educational practice; "what people don't understand, they resist with all their strength" it was argued.

Before unpacking the story of Education 2000, it is instructive to note the work of The Kettering Foundation in the United States whose prime interest is in the development of community. The Kettering Foundation believes, "The promise of community politics is that communities can learn to work better, to increase the capacity of their citizens to join together to face common problems. It starts with citizens – and the way they think, act, and relate to each other and to the problems in their particular communities. At the heart of community politics is an integrated set of ideas that, when put into practice, create opportunities for citizens to make choices and to act on problems that affect *their* common wellbeing."[21] It is the acceptance of mutual responsibility that is at the heart of community – "here everyone matters."

The Kettering Foundation report continues, "As the ideas of community politics become embedded in the life of the community, people develop habits of connecting with each other and issues in new ways. A public – a diverse array of citizens who are joined in ways that allow them

to make decisions and to act on common problems – can emerge out of a collection of busy, preoccupied, heterogeneous individuals. Forming a public is thus not so much about creating an identifiable body of people as it is about creating connections between people in relation to issues. Through the practice of community politics, a committed and democratic public will form and continually evolve. Without an engaged public, lasting community improvement is unlikely. The practice of deliberation is the cornerstone of community politics; deliberation connects people, even people with conflicting interests in ways that allow them to make decisions and act in regard to problems in challenging circumstances."[22]

Deliberation. Talking together. Understanding each other. Not feeling left out. Let's stress that earlier statement; "without an engaged public lasting community improvement is unlikely." As the Kettering Foundation concludes, "The goal of deliberation is not a clear cut agreement or a compromise, but rather a general sense of direction and purpose based on limits…deliberation can stimulate citizens and community organisations to take action *by triggering a sense of possibility."*

A sense of possibility. It was to trigger a sense of possibility that Education 2000 spent much time in its first community-wide project in Letchworth encouraging a community of 35,000 people to deliberate. Although a relatively small urban area, it was not sure of its own identity, and at the time many of the decisions that related to its life were made within a County Council that was more preoccupied with balancing the needs of its million citizens, within the political dogma of the dominant set of politicians, than it was in experimenting with how to release the creative possibilities of one community.

A sort of model that guided the Letchworth Education 2000 project was what had been seen in the schools of Princeton, New Jersey. A medium sized city of some 50,000 people with a highly varied population - including a world famous university, numerous science research laboratories, and a large ethnic minority living on the borders of the old industrial area. For years it had been a community torn asunder by an apparently unrecognisable range of objectives for its schools ranging from university elitism to racial confusion and prejudice. Then, as a whole community,

they decided to take a long, cool look at the changing nature of learning in the early 1980's and challenged the entire community to spend two years establishing a community wide mission statement around their children's education. This involved large numbers of the community. The resulting statement is powerful, but its real strength lay in the processes through which the community passed in order for this to be made. The statement read:

> "This community believes in Functional Literacy for all; that is, the ability to feel comfortable amidst all the change and confusion of a fast-growing, technological society. That comfort comes with knowing that you have learned-how-to-learn and feel confident in your ability to face the future. This depends on developing to the full the ability to think, to communicate, to collaborate, and to make decisions."

After several days in that community it was obvious to see how powerful that mission statement was. Enormous potential had been released; home and school understood each other; teachers had developed a new confidence in what they were doing; technology became a means to an end and was heavily invested in; adults regained their enthusiasm for learning, and sharing their learning with young people; young people were encouraged to take ownership of their own learning.

WE REALISE THAT WE HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER

Building on this exciting experiment from the United States a three-fold strategy was developed in Letchworth England that took as its base the whole of the town, not the sub-components of a single school and their separate catchment areas. The first goal was to get people to deliberate. Twelve community study groups, each comprising ten or twelve people drawn from discreet interest groups such as employers, parents, voluntary organisations, statutory organisations, students, and others were set up. To each group a comparable number of teachers were assigned. Over a 12-month period, meeting at least once a month for two or three hours, each group deliberated over three issues:

1) from the particular perspective of your organisation, what should the schools be aiming to achieve?

2) what can you do to help provide the schools with the resources to do this?
3) what can you do from your own resources to support these objectives, but outside of school time?

These questions prompted lively debate. Some people got very angry. There was much confusion about what schools might properly address, and what had to be the preserve of the home. Some people wished to be highly prescriptive and many – unwittingly – challenged the role of government in legislating over specifically for the curriculum. One group in particular was very interested, the Council of Churches and Faith organisations. They asked for extra time for their deliberations. "The more we study this", they said, "the more we realise that the most – and it's a very big most – that schools can do is to awaken in young people's minds the questions that need to be answered. Schools can't give the answers – they are not faith communities. The better, therefore, that schools help children to frame the right questions, the more important it is that we have our doors – metaphorically and literally – open with people who are really able to answer just these questions." They then followed with the real clinch to the argument; "we realise that we have to work together – school and community – no one group can do this on its own."

A second group supported this integrated agenda. Every two weeks for nearly three years 10 or 15 members of the community sat down to breakfast with some of the teachers. The make-up of the groups varied every two weeks so as to expose everyone to different views, ideas and possibilities. For an hour the teachers would speak with non-teachers about what they hoped to achieve in the schools. There was just one condition. Every member of the community agreed in advance to spend half a day later shadowing that teacher in their school. More and more people started to talk – thoughtfully and knowledgeably about the needs of children.

The concept of shadowing was expressed in the third strand – but this was shadowing for teachers, not pupils. For three years funds were found to enable 15 percent of the teachers to spend three weeks shadowing a member of the community at their place of work. They were asked to investigate three topics:

1) what skills and attitudes does this organisation expect of young employees?

2) how does this organisation seek to develop the professional skills of its employees over the years?
3) what is this organisation doing to exploit technological change for its own benefit?"

There was much deliberation, and it occurred at many different levels. Barriers were being broken down. It had its moments of near collapse. At one breakfast meeting, held in a factory canteen where most of the participants came from small engineering plants one man became totally incensed at what he saw as misdirected priorities. "I don't want any of my young employees to be distracted by all this 'highfalutin' technological stuff. I just want youngsters who are good at following instructions and doing as they're told."

There was a stunned silence, broken eventually by one of the other sheet metal workers who said "You are wrong, Jock, quite wrong. The schools have got it right. If we don't change the foreigners will simply come in and take your place." It was particularly pleasing to find the members of the community delivering our message for us. A particularly valuable group was that made up of 12 students and a similar number of teachers. One of their conclusions, when asked what would most improve the quality of their own learning, was a surprise. They argued "what we need is contact with adults other than parents and teachers. We know what our parents think (they've been telling us that for a long time!) whereas teachers are actually paid to say what they think; what we want to know is what real adults think?"

It's interesting to return to The Kettering Foundation's guidelines. They say, "community politics arises out of a vision of politics in which the public takes on a central role with greater control over, and greater responsibility for, issues important to them. Its goal is to supplement and reinforce, not replace, the activity of government officials." Here people disagree profoundly. Several do not believe that we should automatically assume that the old system can still work effectively in these new environments and that too much of an effort to hold these in place may well thwart the full impact of new ideas.

This is where it becomes very difficult. It is where the work of Letchworth came apart. The relevant authorities simply did not wish to see a subsidiary part of what they saw as the "system" start to do things in a different way. Despite the rhetoric, this is a very tricky issue and the more involved becomes the public, the more aware they are that the ideas of community challenge many of the boundaries that politics normally establishes. The issue goes even deeper than that. Across much of the western world (and certainly in the Anglo-American context) the nature of the involvement that can be released by truly meaningful deliberations across an entire community will often release an energy and a thoughtfulness not normally found within the confrontational style of much conventional politics. This ought to lead to a new way of doing business.

David Matthews, the President of the Kettering Foundation, concludes his summary by saying "when citizens engage together in the practice of community politics they are redefining politics by the way they practice it. Community politics is about more than holding a forum, or community event, or even solving a particular community problem. Ultimately it is about developing ways to allow deeper, deliberative forms of public engagement to take root in the habits, traditions, and culture of their community on an ongoing basis."

There is a further aspect to this. It concerns the young people themselves. For far too long they have been regarded, often subconsciously, as being too young to be involved. That is fundamentally wrong. Basing their ideas on a Swedish Work Orientation Scheme several communities in England sought to emulate the Swedish town's arrangement for all seven-year old students to spend a day shadowing their fathers at his place of work; a day shadowing their mother and two days shadowing their best friend's parents - always one on one. So successful was this that they expanded the scheme to five days a year at the age of 10; 10 days a year at the age of 13, and 15 days a year at the age of 16. By the age of 18 youngsters in that Swedish town would have had the equivalent of 18 weeks of such work orientation.

"That must have been very good for the pupils," John Abbott concluded rather lamely after being shown the scheme. "Of course," was the reply, "but think instead of the effect it has on the

community. Not only do we clean our shoes twelve times more frequently (we tend to be shadowed one day in twenty) but we have got used to being asked apparently naive questions about our work for which we can't find any rational answer...so we have started to change the way we work. But the third reason is the most significant; there is hardly an adult now, within the community, who does not accept at first hand that each of us has to accept a personal responsibility for helping to educate young people. The task is just far too important to be left just to the teachers to do in isolation".

We make grave mistakes in underestimating young people's interest in, and ability for, becoming daily involved in these issues. Of all the audience that I have spoken to in recent years it has been audience of 15, 16, 17 and 18 year-olds who have been by far the most interested. "It's our world you're talking about", they say, "of course we want to get to grips with these issues".

CONCLUSION: LEARNING COMMUNITIES ARE INTRADEPENDENT, INTERDEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT

Community and family are inseparable. Both are under great strain. Robert Wright, in his piece "The Evolution of Despair" quoted earlier said, "People often talk about urbanisation as the process that ushered in modern ills (yet) many urban neighbourhoods at mid-century were in fact fairly communal...it was suburbanism that brought the combination of transience and residential isolation that leaves many feeling a bit alone in their own neighbourhoods."

Wright went on, "The suburbs have been particularly hard on women with young children. In the typical hunter-gatherer village, mothers can reconcile a home life with a work life fairly gracefully, and in a richly social context. When they gather food, their children stay either with them or with aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, or lifelong friends. When they are back at the village, child care is a mostly public task – extensively social, even communal." The anthropologist Margery Shostak wrote of life in an African hunter-gatherer village "the isolated mother burdened with bored small children is not a scene that has parallels in !Kung daily life."

It's simply because, as we explore the nature of human learning, we are continuously reminded that learning is driven by the need to make sense. To make sense of everything the young mind experiences, to fit all those experiences together and to continuously try and fit these into theories of how things work. Howard Gardner explained this well when he talked about "the unschooled mind" of the five-year old. To the inquisitive young mind, no question is "off limits." Everything has to be investigated. Yet personal investigation is becoming evermore difficult, and dangerous. When communities disappear and there is nothing, as it were, between society and the needs of the individual then we are in danger of creating a population that sees nothing of value but their own individual interests. Without that sense of community in their greater lives young people can't relate their theoretical school-based knowledge to everyday reality.

"You can't bring children up to be intelligent in a world that is not intelligible to them," is a statement the Initiative adopted in its earliest months. Communities that really understand themselves are more able to understand other communities. To live in functional communities is to accept responsibility for other people. Learning communities are intradependent, interdependent, and independent. These are good places for children to grow in. To not grow within a community makes it relatively easy to simply be in denial of what are other people's realities. "Streets that are unsafe for children to play in are as much a measure of failed educational policy as are burnt out teachers and decaying classrooms," stated the Initiative several years ago. But not too many people yet see this connection.

Gatto concluded his argument in *Dumbing Us Down* with words that made him anathema to the officials of the New York School authority. He argued, "It appears to me as a school teacher that schools are already a major cause of weak families and weak communities. They separate parents and children from vital interaction with each other and from true curiosity about each others lives. Schools stifle family originality by appropriating the critical time needed for any sound idea of family to develop – then they blame family for its failure to be a family. Whatever an education is, it should make you a unique individual, not a conformist. It should furnish you with an original spirit with which to tackle the big challenges; it should allow you to find values which will be your roadmap through life; it should make you spiritually rich, a person who loves what

you are doing, wherever you are, whoever you are with. It should teach you what is important, how to live and how to die." We think Gatto would approve of the Initiative's questions, "What kind of Education for what kind of World? Do we want our children to grow up as Battery Hens or Free Range Chickens?" These are the essential questions you must now work out for yourselves if the rest of this programme is to make sense.

ENDNOTES:

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